

September 4, 2013

How often can I travel on my US visa?

Question: *"I am planning to visit the Embassy for the first time to apply for a visitor's visa. If my visa is approved, how many times will I be allowed to use it?"*

The consular officer who interviews you will determine your visa's expiration date and the number of times that you may use the visa to travel to a U.S. port of entry. The consular officer's decision will be influenced by three factors: your purpose of travel, the type of visa that you are applying for and your nationality.

When you complete your online nonimmigrant visa application, you need to state your purpose for travel and choose the visa category that is appropriate for that purpose. The interviewing officer reviews that information and confirms that the visa category is appropriate for your purpose of travel.

Nationality is a factor because the U.S. government has many different agreements with countries around the world regarding visa validity. Generally, the maximum validity of a visa is based on what two countries agree that they will provide to each other's visa applicants. Jamaican and Caymanian passport holders benefit from greater reciprocity and can receive multiple-entry nonimmigrant visas for several years' validity, depending on the visa category.

If a consular officer determines that an individual qualifies to receive a full validity B-1/B-2 visitor visa, the officer will approve a 10-year, multiple-entry visa, even if that individual does not have any travel plans beyond his upcoming trip. Individuals qualify to receive a 10-year visa by convincing the consular officer that they have strong, stable ties to their country of residence and that they will not misuse their visas.

In some cases, a consular officer may be convinced that an individual will use a visa properly for an upcoming trip but may not be convinced that the individual has strong enough ties to his residence to qualify for a full-validity, 10-year visa. In these cases, the consular officer may issue a limited visa that is valid only for the planned period and purpose of travel. For example, if someone wishes to travel to the United States for medical treatment several times over the course of six months, the officer may issue a six-month, multiple-entry visa. Similarly, if someone wishes to travel to the United States to visit a sick relative or to take an exam, the officer may issue a single-entry visa that is valid for a month or two.

When you receive your visa, you can determine its validity by looking for the expiration date and the number of entries. When you look for the number of entries, you will see either a specific number, such as 1 or 2, or the letter "M". The letter "M" stands for "multiple" and indicates that you may make an indefinite number of trips to a U.S. port of entry before the visa's expiration date.

After you receive your visa, it is important to remember to use it properly and to avoid any actions that violate U.S. law. If there is reason to believe that you no longer qualify to hold a U.S. visa, your visa can be revoked, even if its expiration date has not yet been reached.

For further information about visa issues, please visit the U.S. Embassy Kingston's website, <http://kingston.usembassy.gov>.